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‘Conservative’ Issue For South Carolina’s Inglis

By Derek Wallbank, CQ Staff

Rep. [Bob Inglis](#) of South Carolina is, by most standards, a reliable Republican vote in Congress, politically cemented in the middle of his caucus.

During the first seven months of the 111th Congress, he has [joined with fellow Republicans](#) on 96 percent of House votes that pit most Republicans against most Democrats. When President [Barack Obama](#) has indicated a clear position on legislation, Inglis has supported that view just 27 percent of the time — even less often than House Minority Whip [Eric Cantor](#) of Virginia (35 percent), who is generally considered to carry impeccable conservative credentials.



But the 2010 election will test whether Inglis' strongly Republican-leaning constituency in the South Carolina's 4th District believes he is conservative enough. That's because the six-term congressman has drawn four Republican primary challengers who argue that he isn't.

Republican State Sen. [David Thomas](#), when he launched his primary campaign in June, said he was "disappointed" in Inglis for voting in early 2007 against the buildup of U.S. troops in the Iraq conflict — a policy, instituted by President [George W. Bush](#), known as the "troop surge" — and for voting in late 2008 for the financial industry assistance, or "bailout," measure (PL 110-343).

Candidate [Christina Jeffrey](#), a professor at Wofford College in Spartanburg, said in a statement on her Web site that Inglis is "symbolic of the path many Republicans have taken over the past few years as he has continued to compromise our conservative values."

Other candidates include [Trey Gowdy](#), a prosecutor, and [Jim Lee](#), an information technology and business consultant. Gowdy, on his

Web site, said there is a "near total disconnect between Washington and the people of the 4th Congressional District," while Lee derided Inglis as a man who has "lost his focus and is now part of the system he originally went to Washington to change."

Gowdy and Thomas, by virtue of their status as elected officials, start out with an advantage in name recognition, according to local political analysts. Gowdy also got a bit of a fundraising start over fellow challengers, though none had a big pile of money at mid-year. According to the candidates' Federal Election Commission (FEC) filings, Gowdy raised about \$88,000 and had \$83,000 in cash on hand, followed by Jeffrey with \$25,000 in receipts and \$20,000 cash on hand, and Thomas with \$17,000 in receipts and \$12,000 cash. Lee did not report any contributions, confirming to the Greenville News in mid-July that he'd raised less than the \$5,000 threshold that requires candidates to file FEC reports.

But the opponent field doesn't have a big early catch-up chore, as Inglis has not done the kind of aggressive fundraising typical of incumbents trying to inoculate themselves from serious challenges. Inglis raised a modest \$130,000 in the year's first half, and with some leftover funds from his last campaign reported \$180,000 cash on hand. Inglis is not, in fact, one of Congress' champion fundraisers: In winning re-election in 2008 with 60 percent of the vote against a typically under-funded Democratic opponent, Inglis spent less than \$500,000, by far the lowest figure for any of South Carolina's six House incumbents.

The fact that Inglis finds himself under attack from the right brings him full circle. He was a conservative firebrand himself when he was elected in 1992 — at age 33 — to his first of two tenures in the House.

Inglis, then a self-described soldier in the "culture wars," observed a three-term limit he had placed on himself and left the 4th District seat open in 1998, when he challenged veteran Democratic Sen. [Ernest F. Hollings'](#) re-election bid but lost by 46 percent to 53 percent.

"The whole premise of our '98 campaign was that Hollings' arrogance would bring him down. I saw myself as pure as the driven snow and really pretty holy, but I was as arrogant as Sen. Hollings, but in a different way," Inglis said in a telephone interview.

After the election, Inglis rejoined his law firm in Greenville, the largest city in the northwestern South Carolina district.

And he only had to wait until 2004 for an opportunity to reclaim his old House seat.

Republican successor [Jim DeMint](#) — who had worked as an aide to Inglis — embarked on what would be a successful campaign for the Senate seat Hollings left open to retire. Inglis ran for the 4th District seat that DeMint left open, easily won a three-way Republican primary with 85 percent of the vote, and cruised to victory in the general election with 70 percent of the vote. He has prevailed handsily since then, winning with 64 percent in 2006 and 60 percent in 2008.

Inglis said he returned to Congress with “a very different approach to politics,” and not just because he has eschewed the kind of term-limit pledge on which he was first elected in 1992. He has joined with Democrats on votes to toughen vehicle emissions standards; ban so-called “enhanced interrogation techniques” that some call torture; and expand funding for global HIV/AIDS research.

He said he’s still a conservative, just a more pragmatic one. He chalks much of the opposition he is drawing for 2010 to a part of the Republican base that would prefer he not work so frequently with Democrats. “Apparently I don’t spit and flail enough,” he said.

While the size of that opposition constituency won’t be tested until the 4th District primary next June 8, it is vocal. His [recent criticism at a town hall meeting](#) of fiery national conservative talk show hosts, such as Glenn Beck, was met with shouts of protest. It also spawned the [Web site](#), which has the motto, “We choose to keep Glenn Beck and replace Bob!”

The first question Inglis will face is whether he can muster a majority of the primary vote. If no one in the crowded primary exceeds 50 percent, the top two vote-getters will face each other in a runoff two weeks later.

Chip Felkel, a Republican strategist based in Greenville, said Inglis has to be considered the favorite to retain his seat at this point in the race.

“In every congressional district there’s always going to be 20 [percent] to 25 percent who’ll vote for anybody but the incumbent,” he said. “I just don’t know that there’s enough discontent to unseat an incumbent unless there’s animals and children involved.”

The 4th District is considered a securely Republican seat, and no Democrat has stepped forward to challenge Inglis yet. But the sense of potential turmoil on the Republican side may encourage a Democratic challenge, and South Carolina Democratic Party spokeswoman Keiana Page said officials are “actively recruiting candidates.”

CQ Politics currently rates the general election race as [Safe Republican](#).

For more information on all the 2010 House races, check the [CQ Politics map](#).

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...her ready smile and studied graciousness, Pelosi has proven a formidable opponent. The first female Speaker of the House, she is always impeccably dressed and present of television cameras, and has the style of Jackie Kennedy and the iron will of MLK. She demands discipline from her ranks, and punishes those who cross her. Pelosi defied the expectations of many GOP critics in the 110th Congress. She shelved causes dear to allies, like pursuing the impeachment of President Bush or strengthening gun control. I scused on issues that could protect her “majority makers,” the largely moderate and conservative men whose victories helped Democrats end 12 years of Republican control in 2006. Pelosi’s ascendancy came as a result of her tireless fundraising and her well-honed political skills. She was elected minority whip in 2001, when she was elected minority whip. After the 2002 election, when Minority Leader Rick Warren was elected speaker, Pelosi was elected minority whip. After the 2002 election, when Minority Leader Rick Warren was elected speaker, Pelosi was elected minority whip. After the 2002 election, when Minority Leader Rick Warren was elected speaker, Pelosi was elected minority whip.

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